

# A NEW HISTORICIST REVIEW OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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## Abstract

*There has always been an argument for a while now about the disciplinary frontier between history and fiction due to the complicated and uncertain relationship between text and context. Accordingly, the history of literary theory, in a sense, can be viewed as a series of theoretical battles between 'textualism' and 'contextualism' (Mojdeyani, 2016), swaying like a pendulum, with momentary victories to one side or the other, reflecting the oscillation between the verbal-literary champions of textualism and socio-historical champions of contextualism. In the light of the foregoing, this study aims at analyzing, using a New Historicism theory, the cultural and historical context of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's **Purple Hibiscus**. The New Historicism is a modern literary theory that concentrates on how events, places, and culture within a society affect or influence a written work. The theory often looks for allusions to characterize the timeframe a novel was written. The paper studies how this novel is a vital part of Nigeria's historical and intellectual literature as well as essential to the present day discussion of New Historicism that is greatly influenced by the work of Michael Foucault and his theories about power and discourse on the one hand, and Stephen Greenblatt's idea of "textuality of history" on the other hand. Despite the obvious political criticisms contained in the novel, it is discovered that **Purple Hibiscus** is a novel about the trying period in Nigerian history.*

**Key Words:** *New Historicism; historical context; fictional text; textuality, contextuality*

## Résumé

*On s'est toujours disputé depuis un moment sur la frontière disciplinaire entre histoire et fiction surtout dans la littérature africaine en raison de la relation étroite et incertaine entre texte et contexte. Par conséquent, l'histoire de la théorie littéraire en un sens peut être considérée comme une série de confrontation théorique entre « textualisme » et « contextualisme » pour reprendre Mojdeyani (2016), se balançant comme un pendule avec des victoires momentanées d'un côté ou l'autre, reflétant l'oscillation entre les champions du textualisme littéraire et ceux du contextualisme. A la lumière de ce qui précède, cet article analyse à l'aide de la théorie « New Historicism », le contexte culturel et historique de *L'hibiscus Pourpre* de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Le « New Historicism » est une théorie littéraire moderne qui se concentre sur la façon dont les événements, les lieux et la culture au sein d'une société affecte ou influence une œuvre littéraire. Cette théorie recherche souvent des allusions pour déterminer la période pendant laquelle un roman a été écrit. Cet article montre en quoi le roman *L'hibiscus Pourpre* est une partie vitale de la littérature historique et intellectuelle du Nigeria ainsi qu'un élément essentiel de la discussion actuelle sur le « New Historicism », qui est grandement influencé par le travail de Michel*

Foucault et ses théories sur le pouvoir et le discours d'une part, et l'idée de « textualité de l'histoire » de Stephen Greenblatt d'autre part. Malgré les critiques politiques évidentes contenues dans le roman, on découvre que *L'hibiscus Pourpre* est un roman essentiellement basé sur la période difficile de l'histoire nigériane.

**Mots clés :** « New Historicism », contexte historique, texte fictif ; textualité, contextualité

## Introduction

*Purple Hibiscus* has long been regarded as one of Chimamanda Adichie's more linguistically, if not literally diverse, novel. As a result of this assertion, much critical works focused on the linguistic and thematic features of the novels such as language and indexing, humour and caricature, violence, feminism, power or abuse of it, religious dogmatism, social relation, right denial, etc, at the expense of the socio-political, cultural and historical disposition of the novel. Only few studies, such as K. Dawes (2005) which discussed the clash of culture in the novel, explore how the cultural context and the poetic language of the novel support the author's social and political inclination.

L. Lawal and A. Fatai (2013, p. 123) examined how special and unique, language used has assisted Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* to exhibit and address the aspect of the ideological configurations of gender and power. To them, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's magnum opus, *Purple Hibiscus*, ranks among the recent literary texts that is permeated with preponderance of exclusive ideological expressions and a lot of other literary and linguistic apparatus.

This paper therefore agrees with the opinion of L. Lawal and A. Fatai (2013). Judging from the foregoing, the paper seeks to discuss the historical context in a textual fiction of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. This is to examine how this novel is a vital part of Nigeria's historical literature as well as its importance to the present day discussion of New Historicism. This is influenced by the work of Michael Foucault and his theories about power and discourse and Stephen Greenblatt's idea of "textuality of history" (cited by Mojdegani, 2016).

To achieve the stated objectives, the paper critically analyses the context and social life of the fictional characters of *Purple Hibiscus* to show the political, social and cultural discourses found in the novel. The paper shows that the novel, to some extent, is a reflection of Nigeria's political, social and cultural history.

## 1. Theoretical Framework: New Historicism

According to B. A. Dobie (2012, p. 177), New Historicism is difficult to pin down, partly because it is still changing and developing and partly because it draws on widely diverse fields that seem to have little in common except their interest in the study of cultures. Also, R. Sharma (2014, p. 1) writes that New Historicism “is the most innovative critical movement which came in 1980” because of the critical manifesto of Stephen Greenblatt, who coined this very term for the first time in his treatise “The power of forms and the Forms of power in the Renaissance”, with the intention of propounding new critical methods for interpretation of texts.

To fully understand the basic assumptions and principles of New Historicism, there is a need to compare it with “Old Historicism”. “Old Historicism” can be defined as an old method of literary analysis in which history serves as a background to literature. The historical context sheds light upon the text. Behind this literary analysis, there is an assumption that historians are able to write objectively and able to state definitively the truth about the mind-set, the worldview, or the belief of any group of people according to E. Bressler 2012, p. 128. On the contrary, New Historicism which was coined by Stephen Greenblatt (cited by S. Maza, 2004) is the most recent approach to textual interpretation which emerges in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It challenges the assumptions or goals laid down by the “Old Historicism”. Therefore, New Historicism sees that every history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affect their interpretation of the past. It observes that history can never provide us with the “truth” or give a total accurate picture of past event or the worldview of a group of people: “New Historicism proclaims that it provides its adherents with a practice of literary analysis that highlights the interrelated of all human activities, admits, its own prejudices, and gives a more complete understanding of a text than does the old historicism and other interpretation approaches” G. Castle (2013, p. 119). Thus, all history is intuitively recognized and set down, coloured by the cultural context of the recorder, usually a person of power, thus leaving untold the stories of those who were powerless.

The New Historicist critic would want to hear and identify all the voices. The New Historicist believes that the truth, if such a thing exists, would be narratologically and culturally contingent. New Historicism provides

a critical method of interpretation of a literary work of art, which sees literature and history as a part of dynamic exchange. It is based on the assumption that a literary work is the product of time, place and circumstances of its composition. The New Historicists, therefore, reject the autonomy of both an artist and work of art and argue that literary texts cannot be read and understood in isolation. They emphasize that literary texts must be read and interpreted in the biographical, social and historical contexts.

### ***1.1. Features of New Historicism Theory***

In analysing a novel, the New Historicist thinkers tend to take a more critical view of power, seeing it not exclusively as class-related, but spreading throughout society. This view is derived primarily from Foucault. C.T. Indira (2005, p. 558) rightly observes:

New historicism is eclectic in its theoretical basic but has opened up a fascinating mode of analysis of cultural practices which goes beyond the scope of the structuralist methodology in studying cultural institutions. It combines the spirit of deconstruction with the ideological orientation of Marxism and post-Marxism, and finds a rich source in the concepts of power and history as set forth by Foucault.

New historicists seek to find “sites of struggle” to identify just who is the group or identity with power and being anti - establishment, it always implicitly approves personal freedom and celebrates all forms of difference and deviance. New Historicism is also interested in recovering lost histories and exploring mechanism of repression and subjugation. It tends to draw on the disciplines of Political Science and Anthropology given their interest in governments, institutions and culture.

### ***1.2. Synopsis of Purple Hibiscus: The Plot***

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* is a twenty-first century literary text on colonization. This novel of 310 pages is divided into four parts with several chapters. The story line sheds light on different events which take place in the life of the family of Kambili. In that family, the reader’s attention is drawn to the story of Eugene Achike, Kambili’s father whose fanatical version of Catholicism has turned the life of the entire family members into hell: “Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère” (p.

11). Kambili, Jaja and their mother, Beatrice must obey to the letter all the instructions, rules and regulations laid down by Eugene if they want to remain alive. It is important to note that to have everything under his total control, Eugene Achike has a time table to do everything in his house. His power structure begins to crumble when Jaja and Kambili visit their aunt Tatta Ifeoma at Nsukka where they learned “A freedom to be, to do” (p. 24).

In the second part titled: “Speaking with our Spirit before the Palm Sunday” (p. 25), Kambili narrates the family history of violence and repression under the father’s dictatorship. It is in this session that she gives the reason behind Jaja’s resistance and open up the family’s story of violence and repression under the father’s dictatorship. It is important to recall that Jaja and Kambili must be first always in their respective classes. They must not spend more than 15 minutes with their grandfather because he is a traditionalist. But when Jaja and Kambili travel to Nsukka to stay with Aunty Ifeoma and her family they discover that the family life is full of dogmatism that must be eradicated.

“The Pieces of Gods after Palm Sunday” (p. 259), which is the third part of the novel shows the end of dogmatism in the life of Kambili, Jaja and their mother, Beatrice which comes as a result of the death of their oppressor, Eugene Achike by poisoning. The last part “A Different Silence the present” (p. 297) shows Kambili’s family after the death of their father with Jaja in detention who assumes responsibility for his mother’s crime. The family is looking forward for a new way of life far away from the limitation of their freedom to do or not to do.

## **2. Review of Empirical Studies on Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus**

K. Dawes (2005) observed that Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* begins with Achebe’s monumental narrative of a “clash of cultures” as the first sentence in the novel reads “things began to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja did not go for communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère.” Dawes concludes his review by saying that what really falls at the end of the novel is the rigid Catholicism of Eugene Achike.

N. Osunbade (2013), paid scholarly attention to Adichie’s works both from the literary and linguistic perspectives, with greater attention from the former in an article titled: “Reference Assignment and Character Indexing in Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*”. His findings reveal definite

and indefinite reference markers and phobic references, which pragmatically serve to aid character presentation/indexing toward achieving cohesive effects in the advancement of the plot of the novel. A. I. Ijeoma (2015) in an article titled: “Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and the Issue of Feminism in African Novel”, postulated that Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* is a feminist work which challenges the dehumanizing tendencies of the men folk as evident in the character of Mama (Beatrice Achike) who eventually exposed the African conception of an ideal woman who keeps dumb even in the face of humiliation, victimization, and brutality so as to be perceived as a good woman. Ann makes a reverberating case to depict that Achike belongs to the category of liberal feminism.

Still in 2015, E. Yeibo and C. Akerele, in “Style Beyond Borders: Language in Recent Nigerian Fiction” investigated some aspects of lexico-semantic patterning in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, such as simplicity of lexical choices, collocation, semantic fields, selectional restriction rule, category rule violation, imagery and lexical relations (i.e. synonymy), in order to establish their connotative implications. The study reveals that the construction of a literary text is a linguistically conscious activity, as the lexico-semantic nuances and dynamics of Adichie’s text explored are critical and strategic both stylo-rhetorically and in message delivery.

M. A, Yakubu (2016) in an article titled, “The Praxis of Artistry: Humour and Caricature in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*”, analyzed humour and caricature in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* with a view to find out how the devices of humour and caricature can develop the themes of the novel. He concluded that humour and caricature constitute elements that authenticate a work of art as an artistic and a literary work. They as well endow a literary work with the quality that makes it serve a corrective purpose.

Finally, from the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that there exist critical works on Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*. As ample as they may be, a lot of critics pay more attention on the language, style and structure of the text. Others focus primarily on religion, patriarchy or colonization, feminism and education. The current study, which is different from others before now, takes a critical look at Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* from the New Historicism approach. To our mind, none of the critics especially those so far cited in this study, use New Historicism theory to examine the novel.

### 3. A New Historicist Review of Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

New Historicism is a form of literary theory whose goal is to understand intellectual history through fiction, and literature through its cultural context. In a new historicist reading of a literary text, that text should be considered a product of time, place and historical and social circumstances rather than as an isolated work of art or text.

#### ***3.1. The World of the Author and the Text***

*Purple Hibiscus* can be regarded as a social fiction that depicts the Nigerian society during the post-colonial period. The novel has practically all the characteristics of a post-colonial African novel. At the beginning, the narrator makes us to understand that the new priest officiating at St. Agnes Cathedral is a British named father Benedict. While describing the new British Priest, she said:

The colours of his face, the colours of condensed milk and a cut-open soursop, had not tanned at all in the fierce heat of seven Nigerian harmattans, And his british nose was still as pinched and as narrow as it always was, the nose that had me worried that he did not get enough air when he first came to Nigeria. (p. 12).

The narrator further stated that:

Papa always sat in the front pew for the Mass, at the end beside the middle aisle, with Mama, Jaja, and me sitting next to him. He was first to receive communion. Most people did not kneel to receive communion at the marble altar, with the blond life-size Virgin Marty mounted nearby, but Papa did. (p. 12).

Thus, depicting a typical Nigerian and religion setting where the father, head if the family should lead in all aspects of matters concerning his family. .

In addition, the reader of *Purple Hibiscus* can easily locate the different places mentioned in the novel, on any Nigerian map. The narrator mentions of places like Enugu (p. 12) Miles 2, (p. 16) Nsukka (p. 24), Park Lane (p. 28), Ogui Road (p. 35), Government Square (p. 35) University of Nigeria, Nnsukka (p. 19), Enugu (p. 302), Abba (p. 67, 75, 310), Ogiie Market (p. 241), Genesis or Nike Lake (p. 115), Ogbete Market (p. 299), Ogui Road (p. 24)to mention a few.

These places mentioned confirm the opinion of Castle 2013 which says that New Historicism believes that literary work is a product of place. The place in this context is the Nigerian postcolonial society precisely, the Eastern part of the country. The names of the fictive characters found in the novel could also be traced to the names of the Igbos ethnic group located in the eastern part of Nigeria. A look at the life of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reveals a number of significant social forces that resulted in her 2003 writing of *Purple Hibiscus*, a story about a young girl growing up in a turbulent society where human rights are denied or simply ignored. Four power structures can be identified in *Purple Hibiscus*: the political power, the cultural power, the religious power and the patriarchal power.

### ***3.2. A New Historicist Deconstruction of the Political Power in Purple Hibiscus***

*Purple Hibiscus* is a vital part of Nigeria historical literature as well as essential to the present day discussion of New Historicism that is greatly influenced by the work of Michael Foucault and his theories about power and discourse. Power is a means through which the marginalized masses are controlled, and the thing that the marginalized seek to gain. New Historicists seek to find “sites of struggle” to identify just who is the group or entity with the most power (Castle 2013, p. 231).

In some ways, this novel recalls the life of powerless Nigerian civilians who were under the rulership of a military regime that could do all without being intimidated by anybody or any organisation. In fact at the time of the story social measures were firmly taken to keep those that may want to constitute a nuisance in “their place”. While praising Eugene Achike, Father Benedict, the priest of St Agnes cathedral said: Look at Brother Eugene. He could have chosen to be like other Big Men in this country, he could have decided to sit at home and do nothing after the coup, to make sure the government did not threaten his businesses, But no, he used the *Standard* to speak the truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising...Eugene spoke out for freedom. How many of us have...(pp. 12-13).

From the above passage, it is clearly seen that the government was not a democratic one but a military government that got to power through a “coup” and it was specialised in threatening “Big Men businesses” to discourage them from any action that could interrupt their plan. By nature, the poor were powerless due to their inability to take any action,



instead, they demand for a certain financial favour. As a result of intimidation, carried out by powerful forces in the society, even the rich (Big Men) could not do anything either.

The narrator also made mention of bloody coups of the sixties, which ended up in civil war just after her dad left Nigeria to study in England and the military men that would always overthrow one another, because they could and were all power drunk (p. 33). In such a context, the novel becomes a quietly compelling political document, testifying to social wrongs that cry out for attention and change. The reader also found out that, the head of the state of the military regime died: "The Head of the State died - they say he died atop a prostitute, foaming at the mouth and jerking" (p. 301).

This death is similar to that of late General Sani Abacha, former military head of state who died in 1998 because he was alleged to be poisoned by a lady who was a prostitute. Chimamanda was able to re-create that socio-historical context of that event because she carried in her memory a strong sense of the place, her land, and her people. Having listened and witnessed as a child the story of her political past leaders she could create a similar scenario as a writer. She used her creative imagination to give power to the powerless and voice to the voiceless to show today reader that could not witness yesterday history that subaltern can indeed talk and be heard in the society.

Chimamanda equally depicts the efforts of pro-democracy activists to entrench democracy in Nigeria especially against the dictatorship of General Sani Abacha and the desire of Nigerians to be ruled by a democratic government: "But what we Nigerians needed as not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. *Renewed Democracy*". (pp. 32-33). During these struggles, a lot of men and women of goodwill lost their lives. The country became flooded with armed men of different kind. The presence of armed men using instrument of oppression and sowing terror and intimidation of the opposition is revealed by the narrator to warn Eugene, the activist to be careful with his life:

Stop going to work in your official car. Don't go to public place. Remember the bomb blast at the airport when a civil right lawyer was travelling. Remember the one at the stadium during the pro-democracy meeting. Lock your doors. Remember the man shot in his bedroom by men wearing black masks."(pp. 207-208).

From the above quoted text, the warnings given by the narrator refer the reader to many events that really took place in the Nigerian history when Nigerians were fighting for their liberation from the military oppressors. The bomb blast been referred to by the narrator did take place on November 14th 1996 at the International Airport, link road in Lagos. The civil right lawyer that was travelling happen to be Dr Sola Omotshola (Olawale, 2013). The narrator also made mention of another bomb blast which took place at the Lagos Surulere Stadium when the pro-democratic rally was protesting against Sani-Abacha's regime. A close look at the reading of the novel show that the organiser of the pro-democracy rally of Sulurulere stadium that was filled with men who desired freedom was an activist named Nwankiti Ogechi first "disappeared without traces" (p. 206) and was later killed by military government: "Soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in Minna. And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead" (p. 207). By identifying and hearing all voices, the new historicism theory enable the critics to point out the untold story of those political powerless.

New Historicists, in the course of interpretation, actually situate the literary text in its context and recover as far as possible the repressed. New Historicists, though they are interested in issues of history, they interpret the term history in a much broader sense. They do not take history and historical background just as political events of a period; rather, they attempt to emphasize that literature and history are inseparable through social and cultural practices that surrounded the text. A textual representation or a literary text, therefore, is the product of its negotiation with history and cultural exchange.

### ***3.3. A New Historicist Deconstruction of the Cultural Power in Purple Hibiscus***

New Historicism, as inspired by F. Mojdegani (2016, p. 14), frequently addresses the idea that the lower common denominator of all human actions is power. Therefore, the new historicists seek to find "examples of power and how it is dispersed within the text". In *Purple Hibiscus*, there is a dominant group that determines what is acceptable and what is unacceptable for the larger body from a cultural perspective. This dominant group is made up of the people that are found at the head of institution such as the court, the church, the patriarchal institution and the school leaders.

The Catholic Church in Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus* determines the dress code and dictates the ideology to follow. For example, when Aunt Ifeoma and Kambili set out for an outing, she advises Kambili to put on a trouser "to be more comfortable" (p. 88). Kambili, who is influenced by the church ideology, has this to say: "I wanted to tell her that my skirts stopped well past my knees, that I did not own any trousers because it was sinful for a woman to wear trousers" (p. 88). Eugene, who represents the dominant group also subjected the sister, Aunt Ifeoma to the Catholic Church ideology before helping her:

Eugene offered to buy me a car...But first he wanted us to join the Knights of St. John. He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car...I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money...But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things" (p. 103).

We can identify a sort of power struggle but rooted in religion in the passage just cited. Material power is being used to subject Aunt Ifeoma who is in the need but she refused and determine to hold on to her believe. New Historicist recognizes many narratives produced by social strata that may hold contrasting bodies of belief and practices or differing modes of behaviour. As they would put it, writes B. A. Dobie (2013, p. 179) "at any given period, many discourses or ways of seeing and thinking about the world, operate simultaneously. These discourses clash and overlap and repeat, shaping and being shaped by one another". In *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda addresses cultural concerns. Two different cultural discourses operate simultaneously in her novel. Even though the Catholic Church, which is the dominant group tries to annihilate the indigenous culture, there are still good number of people that hold on to their African believe and refuse to be converted to the catholic ideologies. Besides the concepts of political power, subversion and cultural resistance is a theme that is found in the reading of the studied novel.

Achike's fanatical Catholicism and total annihilation of traditional culture is depicted and criticized in the novel while Papa-Nnukwu's stance on the preservation of traditional religion is valued:

These pagan funerals are expensive. One fetish group will ask for a cow, and then a witch will demand a goat for some god of stone, then another cow for the hamlet and another for the *umuada*. Nobody ever asked why

the so called god doesn't ever eat the animals and instead greedy men shared the goats among themselves. The dead of a person is just an excuse for heathens to feast. (p. 204).

The destruction of cultural symbols and values by the catholic missionaries is shown by the writer of *Purple Hibiscus*. The revelation is the result of the consciousness of African colonial period and history. Therefore, the novel is a meaningful utterance, even a valuable means through which African cultural rebirth is achieved. Through her novel, the reader understands that the very notion of a standardized African culture is a false one that has been imposed by powerful institutions as a way of maintaining their own interests. "The Igwe's palace was a few minutes from our house. We had visited him once, some years back. We never visited him again, although the Igwe had converted, he still let his pagan relatives carry out sacrifices in his palace. Mama had greeted him the traditional way that women were supposed to, bending low and offering him her back so that he would pat it with his fan made of the soft, straw-colored tail of animal. Back home that night, Papa told Mama that it was sinful."(p. 101).

The writer proves it by highlighting the different stereotypes that are used to connote the African believes or festival. "Nwunye m" which is a fact of a woman calling another woman my wife "is a remnant of ungodly traditions" (p. 81) that is to say African tradition was full of ungodly thing according to the colonizer. "Aro festival in Abagana is a heathen festival" (p. 82), "Mmuo is something ungodly" (86) it's a ritual of pagan masquerades, a devilish folklore (p. 93). "Your Papa-Nnukwu is not a pagan, Kambili, he is a traditionalist," Aunty Ifeola said. I stared at her. Pagan, traditionalist, what did it matter? He was not Catholic that was all; he has nothing of the faith. He was one of the people whose conversion we prayed for so that they did not end in the everlasting torment of hellfire". (p. 89). A non-Christian is an idol worshiper and can never know anything about Christmas (p. 86).

But by giving voice to the powerless like Aunty Ifeoma, the writer opens a new way of seeing and thinking about African culture. Therefore, the perception of Kambili about her grandfather changes: "your Papa-Nnukwu is not a pagan, Kambili, he is a tradiditionalist" said Aunty Ifeoma. Kambili equally discovers that her grandfather unlike her father who professes to be a Christian and is not a caring and loving man who loves and prays for all his children. She discovers that her grandfather

stands for love, peace and freedom. Auntie Ifeoma is the only female character in the novel, which provides an appropriate role model for Kambili and Jaja. This may be because she manages effectively to evade the traps of patriarchal motherhood. Adichie offers in the novel a syncretisation of Christianity and African traditional religion through her fictive character, Kambili. Father Amadi integrates Igbo songs and language into the Catholic rituals.

New Historicists celebrate freedom, defiance and resistance (Castles 2013, p. 122). Before Jaja and Kambili's visit to Nsukka where they get the spark of defiance, there is a growing resistance in Jaja. He tells Kambili they will protect their unborn brother; he claims responsibility for their staying for twenty-five minutes in Papa-Nnukwu's house against their father's explicit instruction, "Kambili and Jaja, you will go this afternoon to your grandfather's house and greet him....And, as usual, you will stay not longer than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes" (p. 61). He also owns up to instructing Kambili to eat cornflakes ten minutes before the Eucharistic fast. Unlike Jaja who has been aware of their father's authoritarian leadership and his chains of bondage. Jaja is not regretting leaving the house of bondage, for when Kambili tells him that their father is crying, he never comments on that, but simply tells her, "The gardener is waving, too" (p. 109).

In other words, as the gardener cleans the compound of dead leaves and flowers, so will Jaja come back to defy the father's authoritarian leadership. Another act of defiance is seen in the attitude of Mama who refuses to submit herself to the rules and regulations guiding their society after her husband's death. Auntie Ifeoma took also her ground when she stood against "the sole administrator of the University" (p. 228) by challenging him concerning the rulership of the institution. Amaka also resisted the order of the Catholic Church by rejecting the idea that Igbo name could not be used for baptism (p. 276). Father Amadi sang Igbo songs against the wish of the white missionaries who think that the indigenous languages were not good enough to sing praises to God. Even Mama turns away the family member of her late husband to commiserate with her.

## **Conclusion and suggestions**

The author of *Purple Hibiscus* is confident that change is the law of nature. She becomes philosophical and says, "The new rains will come down

soon” (p. 310). She is, in fact, positive and optimistic in her attitude to life. Her works are cultural artefacts to be read and understood by applying New Historicism theory which gives us a glimpse of social, cultural and political life in Nigeria after independence. Her works bear the stamps of authorial context, textual context which provide a green pasture for New Historical studies. Her presentation of operation of power at various levels is another interesting site for the New Historicism critics.

As a New Historical writer, Adichie has ‘textualized the history’ and ‘historicized the text’ which produces both ‘resonance’ and ‘wonder’ and are essential qualification for a great work of art. She has also given concrete and practical suggestions for a better and acceptable change in her society which is based on modern liberal democratic norms. She thus discourages dictatorship, religious dogmatism and extremism, which seem very rampant in the modern day Nigeria. To us, these suggestions will go a long way in creating an equitable and just society where suitable and sustainable peace and development will be achieved. Thus, through New Historicism literary discourse, Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* has contributed to the debate of how an equitable and just society should be.

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